

## GREETINGS FROM GREG-It's All About Soul

### Special points of interest:

- This is the initial installment of the GVRA Monthly Newsletter
- This additional component continues GVRA's efforts to establish an effective communications system with its programs
- Help name our monthly newsletter (See page 10)

### Inside this issue:

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While I was at the Roosevelt Institute, I learned first hand about the "Spirit of Warm Springs." I often describe it as a special feeling that you get while you're there, hard to put into words but very real in its impact on you. The "Spirit of Warm Springs" is a major reason I loved being at Warm Springs, it was just that special.

In thinking about what to write for my article in this the very first edition of the agency newsletter, I decided to share my thoughts about the agency's "spirit." To me

there is nothing more important than the spirit of an organization. It far outweighs any policy or procedure, job description, organizational chart, chain of command, size of office (or lack thereof), and almost anything else about that organization. Simply put, it is why people stay or leave, and whether or not the organization is a success or a failure. The spirit of an organization is priceless!

Now for some great news: we have a chance to create the spirit of this new agency. At some point, the "Spirit of Warm



*"We must become the change we want to see." Mahatma Gandhi*

Springs" did not exist. It came into being by having everyone there focused on a single mission – to help people with polio. (Continued on page 4)

## Spotlight GVRA Board Member Sandy Adams

Governor Deal appointed Sandy Adams to the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board for a term that expires in 2015. She has taught in Elbert County Schools for 28 years, currently as an Adapted Physical Educa-

tion Teacher at Elbert County Comprehensive High School (ECCHS). Sandy received her Master's in Education from the University of Georgia and an Education Specialist degree from Piedmont College.

She was the first teacher in Elbert County to obtain

(Continued on page 5)



## GVRA Board Meetings and GIB Plant Tour January and February 2013

Since its inception, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Board has placed an emphasis on learning more about the programs within its auspices. In January, the monthly Board meeting was held in Bainbridge, Georgia. The following morning, Board members and leadership staff toured the Georgia Industries for the Blind's Bainbridge plant.



**"THE BAINBRIDGE  
FACILITY TRULY AMAZED  
ME. THE PEOPLE TRULY  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"  
KEITH HORTON, GVRA  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR**

In February, the staff at Roosevelt Warm Springs (RSW) did a wonderful job hosting the Board for its monthly meeting. Afterwards, RWS staff and the Student Council officers took Board members and GVRA leaders on a tour of the campus. Next week, the Board will convene at DAS in Stone Mountain for its March meeting.



## GVRA Enters Collaborative Agreement with DBHDD



On February 12, 2013, GVRA Executive Director Greg Schmieg and Departmental of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) Commissioner Frank Berry signed two interagency agreements. This was an historic first for GVRA.

The collaboration between the two agencies will ensure better service for mutual clients as well as enhance opportunities to maximize federal grant opportunities for GVRA.



DBHDD  
Commissioner  
Frank Berry  
signing the  
MOU

## GVRA GEM OF THE MONTH

### Did You Know?

You can work and earn up to



**\$1,730** per month with no change in your Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability check if you are:

**Under age 22 and**

**Regularly attending school**

If you qualify, the first **\$1,730** of your earned income up to a calendar year maximum of **\$6,960** will not affect your SSI check. This is the Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE).

### If this is you:

When you report your work to your local Social Security



Office, also take proof that you are attending school. If you have more questions, contact your local Social Security Office or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213. NOTE: Special thanks to

**DID YOU  
KNOW??**

## VR and Lowe's: A Partnership for Success

On January 7, 2013, Lowe's opened a 1.4 million square foot Distribution Center in Rome and hired nearly 500 employees. They have made a commitment to hire people with disabilities through the Lowe's Outreach Training Program. In August, VR staff toured the Distribution Center in Statesville, NC to gain

knowledge about the daily operations of the Distribution Center in preparation for the Rome opening.

In October, Andy Johnson, General Manager and Lisa Sauceman, HR Manager of the Lowe's Distribution Center and VR staff, Greco Battles, Sara Bolton, Amanda Buckner, Scott Buckner, Gaylon

Davis, Melissa Freeman, Lila Guerra, Ed James, Krista Mitchell, Quinn Phelps, Paul Ray, Angie Rhudy, Brian Spillers, Lisa Townsend and Deidra Wells met to begin developing a process to recruit and hire people with disabilities. Many meetings were held to discuss what was needed for a successful collaboration. (Continued on page 6)



## It's About Soul-continued from page 1

With every staff person who embraced that single purpose, the "Spirit of Warm Springs" grew stronger and stronger. In fact, so strong that it has lasted almost a century. Polio has been cured but the "Spirit of Warm Springs" continues on, day after day.

We too have that chance, the chance to begin a legacy for this agency that will survive for years to come. If you ask, why do that, or why should we, I want to share some quotes for you to consider: ***"We must become the change we want to see."*** ***Mahatma Gandhi*** and ***"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."*** ***Ralph Waldo Emerson.***

Both of these quotes use plural words, we and us, not I or me. The true spirit of an organization like GVRA cannot be created by just one person, no matter what his/her title. For it to be real, it takes a majority, and ideally it takes all of us. Because I believe so strongly in this, I pledge to you that I will do my part, but I need your help. I can, however, share with you what I would love to see as the spirit of GVRA. It starts with respect and honesty, for each other and especially for those we serve. That is followed by the desire to see the best in every single person and a commitment to serve each one to the best of our ability, along with a willingness to do whatever may be required to be successful. And finally, to serve each day

with a joy in our hearts knowing that we are blessed to do so. Just imagine what that type of agency would look like, or more importantly "feel" like.

So in closing, let me make my request to each of you clear. The spirit of GVRA will be defined by us, all of us. It will be defined by the words and actions each of us demonstrates every single day. I ask you to think about every interaction you have with one another and with every one of our consumers and their families. Are you creating a "spirit" that you can be proud of, that your peers would support, and that people with disabilities would favor. Please join me in shaping a legacy that will endure for a long time to come. Thank you.

## Warm Springs is a Special Place to Board Member Loggins

**THERE TRULY IS  
A SPIRIT OF  
WARM SPRINGS**

When Gainesville attorney Fay Loggins attended the February 2013 GVRA monthly board meeting, it wasn't simply another meeting for him.

On February 13, 1947, a young Fay Loggins entered Warm Springs as a client. Nearly five decades later, the successful attorney and model citizen returned to the same properties as a member of the GVRA Board. If any person can attest to the impact of Warm Springs, it is one of GVRA's new Board members.



## HR Corner-Kathy Albritton

Under the direction of Kathy Albritton, Human Resources (HR) provides quality support and guidance to employees and managers in GVRA. In addition to ensuring fair and lawful employment practices, other services include the development of policies, administration of employee benefits, classification and compensation, employee relations, performance management, and organizational development..

Human Resources is currently in the process of centralizing HR

functions and developing and implementing new processes. The names and contact information for the HR staff will be provided in an upcoming newsletter.

Future plans for the newsletter are to provide ongoing communication to employees about important topics such as policy and procedure, benefits, employee birthdays, retirements, and the introduction of new employees. We welcome any suggestions for future newsletters.



## Spotlight-Continued from page 1

Georgia Master Teacher Certification and is also a National Board Certified Teacher.

Among her many accomplishments, one highlight is that Sandy sponsors the Friends Helping Friends (FHF) service club which now boasts 300 members committed to providing opportunities and assistance to students who have special needs. Approximately four years ago, Sandy helped student Katie McCall found this club in honor and memory of her older brother Bud. It began when Katie enthusiastically offered to help Sandy

teach her class of special needs children at Blackwell Elementary where Bud once attended. Soon some of Katie's friends joined her and the students with special needs began learning new activities at a much faster rate, while Katie and her friends gained wonderful relationships and experiences. One positive benefit is that some FHF members became Student Interns who spend part of their school day assisting students with special needs as part of the Work Based Learning Program as they hope to become Special Education Teachers.

Through the coordination of these programs and generous contributions from the community, FHF members have enjoyed field trips such as those to the Georgia Aquarium, Stone Mountain, a Braves Game, the State Capitol, and special events like the FHF Beauty Pageant, Local Area Special Olympics and other wonderful school projects. For more information and inspiring pictures, go to [http://elbertchs.sharpschool.net/departments/adapted\\_pe\\_fhf](http://elbertchs.sharpschool.net/departments/adapted_pe_fhf). NOTE: Special thanks to contributor Daronne Patterson (Continued on page 5)

## Welcome to GVRA!

GVRA would like to welcome the new employees that have been hired in 2013:

Jennifer Barnett (VR-Newnan)  
 Allison Wellington Brown (GIB-Griffin)  
 Jeffrey Lynn Creasy (GIB-Albany)  
 Precious Davis (Facilities)  
 LaTricie Demming (VR-Athens)  
 Rhonda Denby (VR-Athens)  
 Ashish Dhungel (RWS)  
 LaCarrious Manuel (Human Resources)  
 Demetria McCrary (VR-Jonesboro)  
 Elizabeth McGarey (BEP)  
 Heili Randall (VR-Jonesboro)  
 Mark Rhetta (DAS)  
 Thoma Middlebrooks Sigman, Jr. (DAS)  
 Rixon Smith (GIB-Albany)  
 Shirley Wilson (DAS)  
 Gary Steven Woodall (GIB-Griffin)  
 Sheryl Young-Wilhite (Human Resources)

## We Need Your Help!!

Together, we can make the GVRA Monthly Newsletter an excellent source of agency and program information. Have an idea for an article or content for submission? Email Government Relations and Communications Director Kevin Harris (Kevin.harris@gvra.ga.gov). The last day to submit content for the April edition will be **Friday, March 22, 2013.**



## VR and Lowe's-continued from page 3

Some of the topics discussed during the meetings were essential job functions; Lowe's hiring process and meeting Lowe's management expectation.

VR Counselors complete a Lowe's Screening Questionnaire for each client they would like to recommend for hire, which is then forwarded to the RES lead, who in turn contacts Lisa Sauceman with the recommendation. The poten-

tial employee then completes an online application and assessment, attends an information session with Lowe's where the history of Lowe's and the importance of attendance and safety is discussed. After the applicant completes these steps, they are called in for a behavioral interview.

VR staff have referred at least ten clients already for Lowe's to

consider as applicants. Ms. Sauceman reports she has been pleased with the caliber of applicants that VR has referred.

## **DAS NEWS**

### **February 2013 Employee of the Month**

**Walt Peoples**

**Budget Unit**

**(Stone Mountain)**

**Walt's nomination was submitted by Jeannie Baggett in the category of Teamwork:**

"Walt came to the Budget Unit at a crucial time. It was right after the merge with our new Parent Agency. The transition made it necessary for the Budget Unit to quickly master training on two new systems: Concur Travel and PeopleSoft Financials. When Walt came to the Unit, he immediately knew the position was the perfect fit for him. The responsibilities matched his skills and his knowledge, and he was ready to be a part of the Team.

After Walt had all the training and tools to handle all the crises of the transition, he took off running. At the 10 Yard Line: He was processing invoices in less than 30 minutes. At the 30 Yard Line: He was processing Concur Travel in less than 15 minutes. At the 50 Yard Line: He was calling vendors and tracking payments. Touchdown: He is now working with contracts and working on our user-friendly DAS Travel Website.

Walt is value driven, and he will reap great benefits regardless of what happens around him and the challenges the team faces going through the transition. He now does his work with full confidence and little guidance from me. I am consistently impressed by his genuine honesty, character, and teamwork. A mark of a great employee is how he joins himself to the team. I have faith in Walt, and he who has faith in himself will do even greater things. He offers empowerment to the Budget Team, and employs the skills and principles of time management. When you are getting impressive remarks from the Parent Agency about your employee – you must give Walt the Praise!

Finally, Walt quickly saw and adapted to the vision and goals I established for the Team, and as a strong Team member he can step in and fill many roles. I can truly say we have a Budget Team, and Walt can be trusted to cover the Budget Unit in my absence. I asked for an employee that clearly "sees the vision" of the Budget Unit and is ready and willing to do the work. I am truly amazed how Walt has grasped the job as the Budget Paraprofessional in such a short time (less than 6 months), and has made the vision come true for the team. The Budget Unit is small, but we made a Touchdown when Walt came onboard. Walt has allowed the Budget Team to RISE UP!"

### **March 2013 Employee of the Month**

**Roger Boyd**

**Adjudicator**

**(Stone Mountain)**

**Roger's nomination was submitted by Patty McMurray in the category of Agency Commitment:**

"Roger continually maintains a low caseload. His processing time is just 56 days with excellent quality. He has a very low CE rate and very few aged cases. He volunteers routinely to assist the supervisor when others in the unit need assistance on their caseloads. He has been a tremendous help to the unit and to the agency in providing excellent customer service to all claimants. I can always count on him to assist those with high caseloads by reading MER, signing cases up for MC review and completing determinations. He is a valuable asset to the agency."

**CONGRATS, WALT AND ROGER!!**

## PEPP Foster Youth Pilot Project

VR Region 4's Douglasville office has begun a collaborative project to support foster youth with disabilities in the attainment of successful transition from school to work through effective service coordination. The project, being piloted by Parents Educating Parents and Professionals, Inc (PEPP) in conjunction with GVRA's VR Program, will target youth who are in foster care and have a disability.

PEPP will provide assistance to VR staff, families and students by providing educational advocacy, orientation and training on key topics surrounding transition and skill development.

VR staff member Anna Marie Davis, under the supervision of Debbie Slaton, will counsel 10-20 youth with disabilities referred by foster care or the courts and work closely with DFCS, PEPP Case Managers, DJJ, the Douglas Educational Summit and the Douglas County School System to provide ongoing intensive support services. The goal is to address educational services, financial management, work readiness, career counseling, job placement, independent living and micro enterprising skills.

It is hoped that upon the successful completion of this pilot process, this project will be expanded to other areas.

## Executive Director Speaks at Disability Day



On a beautiful but cold Thursday morning in January, Executive Director Greg Schmieg spoke at the 15th Annual Disability Day at the Capitol. In one of the largest responses of the day,

**“EVERYONE WHO  
WANTS A JOB SHOULD  
HAVE A JOB!”  
GREG SCHMIEG**

Schmieg enthused the crowd to join hands and shout, “Everyone who wants a job should have a job!”. With over 2,000 people in attendance, the event was a highlight of the 2013 legislative session.



## Success Story

### Region 4 – Carrollton/Douglasville



“Working at Ingles’s.....these people are like my family”! Those were the heart-felt words of Julian Hatmaker when Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) talked with him prior to his case being closed recently in Status 26. Julian was referred to the Vocational Rehabilitation office in Carrollton by Villa Rica High School in February 2011 as a transition case, with a documented disability of mild mental retardation.

A work plan was developed with his VR counselor. Mr. Hatmaker was very motivated to work but lacked any work history or experience. His VR counselor requested assistance from Rehabilitation Job Readiness Specialist (RJRS) Bohannon to work with Mr. Hatmaker on job readiness skills while he was attending high school. RJRS Bohannon met with client at Villa Rica High School and together worked on job applications, and other job readiness skills. Rehabilitation Employment Specialist (RES) Spruill met with client and assisted him with completing the DOL Registration form to aid him in locating a suitable job. RJRS Bohannon and RES Spruill coordinated their visits to Villa Rica High School to provide services to Mr. Hatmaker through his Community Based Instruction (CBI) teacher at the time, Lisa Davis.

Mr. Hatmaker had been working in a non-paid position as a bagger/courtesy clerk at the Ingles Grocery Store in Villa Rica for several weeks as part of the school’s Community Based Instruction Program and stated he liked this type work and was interested in continuing to work there as a regular paid employee after his graduation. Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Hopkins and CBI teacher, Steve Fuller, felt Mr. Hatmaker could benefit from VR’s Community Work Adjustment Training (CWAT) program so he could continue to learn important work habits, behaviors, and work skills beyond those that might be afforded him solely under the CBI program and thought there might be a chance for him to be retained as a regular employee. Therefore, CRC Hopkins amended his plan to include CWAT and talked with Ingles’ Store Manager Andy Lindgren to finalize the arrangements.

CRC Hopkins initially approved 8 weeks of CWAT. During this time Mr. Hatmaker made remarkable improvement in his work skills but, at the end of the eight weeks, Store Manager Lindgren advised CRC Hopkins that client still had not reached the level management would like regarding his ability to work independently. At this point CRC Hopkins discussed the possibility of offering On-the-Job Training (OJT) and the services of a job coach if Mr. Lindgren would be willing to hire client directly. Mr. Lindgren agreed to hire client as a permanent employee with these inducements. RES Spruill maintained regular on-going follow up with client to monitor his continued progress, and as it turned out, a job coach was never needed. After six weeks of OJT, client was transitioned into status 22 and was subsequently closed status 26. Mr. Hatmaker continues to maintain his competitive employment as a Bagger at Ingles Grocery Store to the complete satisfaction of both his managers and the client...thanks to the services and support provided by VR.



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The GVRA Monthly Newsletter needs a name! To submit your idea, email Kevin Harris @ Kevin.harris@gvra.ga.gov.

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## GVRA WEBSITE COMING SOON!

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## disABILITY Quiz

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Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) was formed on July 1, 2012, by an act of the Georgia General Assembly. GVRA has five statutory programs: Business Enterprise Program (BEP), Disability Adjudication Services (DAS), Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB), Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation (RWS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Also, the Cave Spring Rehabilitation Center transferred to GVRA as part of the VR Program.

A person's self-image is strongly tied to the words used to describe him/her. The following sentences contain descriptors in *italics* that are commonly used in referencing the population served by GVRA. Please read each sentence carefully and, on the space provided, correct the language if you believe **it does not value the individual**.

1. George, a successful businessman, has been *wheelchair bound* for 22 years.
2. There are more than 58,000 *handicapped* people in the United States.
3. Ellen, you are so competent on your job, that we often forget you are *disabled*.
4. Today, with job training and support, *retarded* people can perform many needed jobs.

5. Southern Bank is to be commended for their ongoing efforts to accommodate *epileptics* among their call center staff.

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\*Each month, we will provide a quiz or activity, so get your pens and pencils ready. (Answers-of course-will be found in the next month's newsletter!)

